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Extreme Backyard Wrestling: Dangerous Trend Sweeping Suburbia

BY CBSNEWS.COM STAFF CBSNEWS.COM STAFF
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There is shocking new evidence that children do imitate what they see on TV.

The most popular programming on cable TV is professional wrestling, where well-trained adults appear to beat each other to a pulp.

Now it has become a dangerous craze among child amateurs, turning backyards into wrestling arenas, as Byron Pitts reports for *Eye on America*.

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It is called backyard wrestling, or more appropriately, extreme backyard wrestling. A full-fledged, not-for-the-faint-of-heart teenage trend, it is grunting and flailing its way through the suburbs of the



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"Body slammin'," "back slappin'," or setting a friend on fire is 18-year-old Justin Smith's idea of fun. From garbage cans to stops signs, nothing is out of bounds.

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"If you can pick it up, you can use it," explains Smith. "We've all beat the living bejesus out of each other, but none of us are mad about it. He's [a friend and participant] been paralyzed; I've cracked a rib; he's [another participant] blacked out a couple of times; his arm turned green for no reason."

The match that CBS' Pitts witnessed was violent, but pales in comparison to the violence in some backyard wrestling videotapes marketed on the Internet.

Dr. Joseph Zanga, chief of pediatrics at Loyola University, says that doctors are seeing more of these children in emergency rooms and



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injury, spine injury, paralysis."

Children, in many cases, engage in backyard wrestling with their parents' permission.

"For the most part, the parents don't really like it. But they don't really stop us because at least we're not stealing cars, burning down churches, and smoking crack," Smith and his friends say.

Smith's father, Tony, says, "If I had a choice I would choose something else, obviously, but we tolerate it."

"So why wouldn't you just say, 'you've got to stop this?' He's 18 years old. He's bigger than me. I can't," says Smith's mother, Jennifer.

Thus far, no one can stop these kids. In some cities, police have intervened, but the teenagers simply change locations.

To its critics, extreme backyard wrestling is a trend born purely out of TV-kids imitating what they see adults do 3 nights a week. But now professional wrestlers and promoters have condemned backyard wrestling.

Gary Davis of the World Wrestling Federation says, "When you see some of these teenagers in these makeshift backyard rings saying that they are doing the same type of things, well they are not, because we are not dropping people on their heads. The bottom line is, don't try this at home. Don't try this at school. Just sit back and enjoy the entertainment."

Many hope this unregulated and rarely supervised fad will soon fade away. Smith says he may stop when he goes to college in the



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don't just go bowling or to the movies, he replies, "Because bowling you don't get to make your friend bleed."

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